

Published November 5, 2006

[From Clinton County News]

'Waiting children' a growing issue in adoption

ST. JOHNS - November - National Adoption Month - is a month set aside to raise awareness of adoption, particularly adoption of "waiting children."

Waiting children are those in the foster care system. Children may stay in the foster care system for days or weeks or longer. The role of foster care is care for these children while their birth parents work to resolve the problems that resulted in the child being placed in foster care. Sometimes the problems are resolved, and the family is reunited. Other times, parental rights are terminated and the child becomes available for adoption.

Waiting children adoptions are often referred to as special needs adoptions. The term special needs often is perceived as meaning children with severe problems. The term actually refers to waiting children, those who are harder to place than healthy infants.

Advertisement



Waiting children fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Those who have emotional, mental, learning or physical impairments;
- Those who are part of a sibling group that must be adopted together;
- Those of minority heritage; and/or
- Those who are older than five

Waiting children may have been victims of abuse or neglect. Some were born to mothers who abused drugs or alcohol, creating a dependency in the infant.

Regardless of the circumstances the children come from or the impairments they carry, they all have one need in common, according to Carolyn Delavan, senior juvenile services officer with the Clinton County Juvenile Court. They all need a home and family.

According to Lutheran Social Services of Michigan, at any given time, there are more than 18,000 children in Michigan are in foster care. Those who are not reunited with their birth families often face long periods of foster care.

According to Michigan Department of Human Services, 4,047 children became wards of the court in the state in fiscal year 2005. Many of those children are now eligible and waiting to be adopted. Some will be adopted by other family members. Some will be adopted by their foster parents. Many will wait until they are welcomed into the hearts and home of their adopted family, if that ever happens for them.

Eligible children who are not adopted often have a bleak outcome. After age 11, the chances of being adopted decrease drastically, according to state statistics. Those children are in formative years when love and stability are crucial. On average, a foster child in the United States will be placed in three different foster homes during three years in foster care. Children who spend long periods in foster care and in multiple placements are at higher risk for developing behavior and mental health problems, as well as having problems in school.

Anyone interested in learning more about adopting a waiting child is encouraged to contact the Michigan Department of Human Services or a private adoption agency. Another valuable source of information on waiting-child adoption is the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange at www.mare.org. The Web site offers information of foster care, adoption and a database of children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted.